
Lounger's Miscellany.

NUMBER III.

SATURDAY, JUNE 14th, 1788.

Want of protection is the apology for want of genius ; Milton and Fontaine did not write in the bask of court-favour ; a poet or a painter may want an equipage or a villa by wanting protection : they can always afford to buy ink and paper, colours and pencil.

HORACE WALPOLE.

TO a man of reflection nothing will appear more inconsistent and contradictory to reason than those idle and absurd lamentations which are so frequently poured forth on the subject of deserted Genius. Idleness is ready to pity, but to relieve is the work of activity — They who cannot feel soon learn to moralize. We are therefore told of the many valuable works which the world has lost, from it's ingratitude in with-holding that notice and support which merit is unquestionably entitled to. The names of those whom want had condemned to obscurity during their lives, are represented as martyrs in the cause of literature, and their sufferings magnified with every aggravation that fiction and false argument can suggest. — By a mind lost in melancholly, or racked with discontent, the picture of a Lydiat's life, or a Galileo's end is always surveyed in the most unfavourable light ; and the contemplation of it, though at first it produces but regret, too commonly ends in murmuring ; from such subjects, Infidelity neglects not to draw her most plausible arguments,

and to tax with injustice in it's dispensations, that providence which it will neither reverence nor obey.

IF fortune, when she neglects the wise and the virtuous, conferred happiness as she scatters wealth, we might, perhaps, be more readily pardoned for expressing a wish to reverse her decrees, or for hastily concluding in the hour of despondence, that the best of us are beneath the slightest attention of the author of our nature. Observation will however instantly discover, that in the great lottery of life it is so directed, that there shall be no blanks, and that the prizes are of more equal worth than we are at first inclined to suppose them.

To weak or prejudicial eyes whatever difference may appear to be in our situations, in truth our portions of good and evil are distributed to us from no unequal hand. A narrow mind will with difficulty be prevailed on to believe that the want of power, riches and distinction may be amply compensated by sources of intellectual enjoyment peculiar and inexhaustible, and that genius, like virtue, is her own reward. The mass of mankind cannot readily comprehend how the anticipation only of honest fame should in itself prove a sufficient incitement "To scorn delights, and live laborious days;" nor will they be soon convinced, that to him who with conscious security meditates on immortality, the perishable objects, on which the attention of meaner mortals is engaged, so far from exciting envy, do but provoke contempt, and that mental satisfaction to the unjustly neglected, is not mere consolation but positive happiness.

THOUGH patronage and plenty may occasionally call forth the latent abilities of the young or the diffident, they oftener tend to distract and divert them. That temperance to which the sons of poverty are condemned, seldom fails to brace the mind and give a nerve and vigour to it's exertions; whilst relaxation and debility are the frequent consequence of encouragement and affluence.

It was affirmed by a King of France, with equal truth and shrewdness, "*that poets and horses were to be fed and not fattened.*" Juvenal however, with less disrespect for the efficacy of "solid pudding" is of a different opinion—Let us hear him in his own animated language, pleading in his own cause.

"Sed



"Sed vatem egregium, cui non sit publica vena,
 "Qui nihil expositum soleat deducere, nec qui
 "Communi feriat carmen triviale moneta;
 "Hunc, qualem nequeo monstrare, et sentio tantum,
 "Anxietate carens animus facit, omnis acerbi
 "Impatiens; cupidus sylvarum, aptusque bibendi
 "Fontibus Aonidum."

SAT. 7.

"But he whose noble genius is allow'd;
 "Who, with stretch'd pinions soars above the crowd;
 "Who mighty thought can cloath with manly dress;
 "He, whom I fancy, but can ne'er express;
 "Such, such a wit, tho' rarely to be found,
 "Must be secure from want, if not abound.
 "Nice is his make, impatient of the war,
 "Avoiding bus'ness, and abhorring care;
 "He must have groves; and lonely fountains chose,
 "And easy solitudes to bait his muse."

DRYDEN'S Translation.

HORACE, he informs us, was in excellent plight when he produced the most sublime of his odes,

"Satur est, cum dicit Horatius Evæ." SAT. 7.
 "Horace ne'er wrote but with a rosy cheek;
 "His belly pamp'rd, and his sides were sleek."

DRYDEN.

And had not Virgil chanced to have been in possession of a footman and a competency,

"—— Caderent omnes a crinibus hydri:
 "Surda nihil gemeret grave buccina."

SAT. 7.

"The crested snakes had dropt upon the ground,
 "And the loud trumpet languish'd at the sound."

DRYDEN.

THIS is all fair enough from a professional man, who, though he did not want genius, might want money; but the truth of this doctrine I am wholly inclined to doubt—besides there is a kind of *υπερον* *πρὸς* *πρὸς* *πρὸς* in this mode of reasoning—Horace and Virgil had established their reputation as poets, before they received their good things from Augustus; they derived their patronage from their merit, not their merit from their patronage. That evil should be productive of good is a comfortable consideration, and this is seldom more con-

spicuously exemplified, than in those instances wherein the misfortunes of our lives are made instrumental to the improvement of our minds, to the quickening of our faculties, and ultimately to the promotion of our fame. Had *Salvator Rosa*, instead of herding with the banditti and eating the bread of misery, passed his days in tranquility and independence, we should perhaps never have felt the wild sublimity and terrific gloom of his original pencil. To the many miseries which a life of hazard, distress, and disappointment subjected its inimitable author, we are indebted for some of the most striking passages in the *Fairy Queen*, to instance particularly, the personifications of fear, danger, and despair.

THE Gorgon power of penury, which as with a "numbing spell" freezes into inactivity the torpid intellects of a little soul, rather accelerates than impedes the impulse of a great mind, and operates as a never failing stimulus to action — "The genius of Shakespeare (to use the magnificent language of Johnson, who is himself an instance of what he is describing) was not to be depressed by the weight of poverty, nor to be limited by the narrow conversation to which men in want are inevitably condemned. The incumbrances of fortune were shaken from him as dew-drops from a lion's mane." Many of the brightest effusions of human wit have been produced under the pressure of indigence, the pangs of disappointment, and the anguish of disease. The fruits of a great mind may ripen without the sunshine of regal patronage, or we never should have seen the best works of Grotius, Raleigh, and Boethius. — The ore of price is discovered in a sterile soil: The Muses have ever warbled the loudest when their notes have been those of distress, as the nightingale (according to a vulgar and exploded tradition) sings sweetest with her breast on a thorn.

It is somewhere remarked by Seneca, that a good man struggling with adversity is an object worthy the attention of the Gods. Superior genius in the same situation is perhaps the next in point of dignity which can engage the attention of man. When we call to remembrance the sad list of those who have drank deeply from the cup of affliction, and deserved better treatment of mankind (to confine ourselves to our own country) among the first that will stand
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against us are Otway, Butler, Savage, Churchill and Chatterton. It is however some consolation to us, notwithstanding the disgrace which is reflected on those contemporaries who could suffer such men to see calamity without offering them assistance, that while we deplore their fate, the general interests of letters have received no material injury. We have all shed tears at *Venice Preserved* and the *Unhappy Marriage*. In the rigid school of misfortune Otway caught his skill in moving the heart; and from being taught by necessity to feel himself, he soon learnt the art of teaching others.

THOUGH Butler's sole reward was praise, and though to the hand of a stranger he was indebted for a tomb-stone, had not the vicissitudes of a life of dependance, by placing him in the family of one of Cromwell's principal officers, carried him to the fountain-head of moroseness and superstition, and thus enabled him to form the clearest ideas, and take the clearest views of the actions and principles of the puritans, we might never have read *Hudibras*, or what were nearly as much the subject of regret, might have read it less perfect.

To the peculiar cast of his misfortunes, Savage is indebted for the greater number of his readers: nor is his poetry itself without it's obligations to his personal misfortunes. *The Bastard*, which is, though not the longest, perhaps the best of his works, arrests our attention rather by unprecedented truth, than the excellence of it's poetry: it irresistibly interests our finer feelings, without charming our judgement or our imagination.

CHURCHILL seems to have considered his inability to command the luxuries of life, as an indignity offered to his nature, and to have resented it accordingly. Armed with a dart formed for the destruction of every vice, he exhausted his quiver on marks beneath his notice, and frequently with a rash and random dexterity encountered subjects that were the last he should have levelled at. Though he possessed the strength of Sampson he seems not to have been without his blindness. Had not his compositions, at least many of them, been dictated by the spur of the occasion, they would not have attained that vigour and spirit which are now their most distinguishing characteristics. A life of decent regularity might perhaps have ad-
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ded to his candour, and diminished his confidence, bitterness and prejudices; we should then have had more of his sermons, but have been deprived of his *Epistle to Hogarth*, and his *Prophecy of Famine*. How he would have succeeded had he invariably enlisted himself in the cause only of virtue and truth, it is impossible to determine. —He appears, like Harry Percy, to have found an indifferent one a more congenial element.

THOUGH neglect might have its share in bringing Chatterton to his untimely end, his life affords the most unequivocal proofs of the independence of the powers of genius, which in conditions the most disheartening, preserve their original bias, maintain their energy unabated, and are to be counteracted by no such impediments, as a confined education, the want of patronage, or the struggles for subsistence. In silence and in solitude were written those pieces which have caused such dissensions among the critics, and which will remain to posterity the most remarkable phenomena of taste and genius in the annals of English literature.

To any one who in future times shall chance to open the story of this unfortunate youth, I cannot forbear suggesting the pathetic words of Virgil on the lamented Marcellus :

“ ——— Ingentem luctum ne quære tuorum :

“ Ostendent terris hunc tantum fata, neq; ultra

“ Esse sinent.”

“ Seek not to know (the Ghost replied with tears)

“ The sorrows of thy sons, in future years.

“ This Youth, the blissful vision of a day,

“ Shall just be shewn on earth, and snatched away.”

DRYDEN'S Translation.

C.

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